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ABSTRACT

Music education students appear to acquire an identity as a "musician" which they seem to construct as having the core meaning "performer." This paper addresses the question of the individual student's search for a clear identity in the dichotomy between the concept of "teacher" and that of "musician." The paper is based on a qualitative research initiative with data coming from participant observation and interviews with music education students in five Canadian universities over a period of 18 months. There is widespread disagreement about the nature of the "musician" who eventually ends up as a teacher in front of children in the schools. Interviews with music education students reveal a difficulty in clarifying their roles as "performer," "musician," and "teacher." These students typically view themselves as either a "performer" on some specific instrument or as a general "musician." It appears that this latter category is the perception of self for students who see themselves less able to compete for the "performer" status. Despite the fact that all of these students are training to become teachers, they see themselves not as teacher candidates but as musicians. (JD)

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Teacher Education as Identity Construction

Music: A Case Study[1]

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Introduction

The research from which this report is extracted attempts to build a theory in the grounded tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to account for the interaction of music education students' in Canadian universities as they come to construct[2] an identity[3] as "musician". The paper is based on a qualitative research initiative with data coming from participant observation and interviews into the social world of music education students over a period of 18 months at the University of Western Ontario, the University of British Columbia, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the University of Alberta and Dalhousie University. The assumption taken here is that the meaning of "musician" is a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) for these students and that music education students interact on the basis of the meanings that they come to associate with this social construct.

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1990 Conference of Atlantic Educators in Halifax, N.S.

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It can be shown that this construct is a pivotal component of the music education students' identity, in fact, an all engulfing construct (Hargreaves, 1976:204) in the formation of their identity. The music education students appear to acquire an identity as a "musician" which they seem to construct as having a core meaning "performer" and this process of construction appears largely dependent upon social interaction[4] and occurs most particularly through societal reaction.

Within the process[5] of music teacher education in Canadian universities, however, what counts as "musician" is not as unproblematic as might be assumed and there is generally widespread disagreement in the literature as to the nature of the "musician" that eventually ends up as a teacher in front of our children in the schools. Witkin (1974:120) suggests that "one of the problems is that the music teacher is usually himself trained from the point of view of the instrumentalist". There is, he asserts, "among music teachers, a fear and distrust of experiment, of musical invention, of anything that threatens the disciplined service to the musical masters that their training has developed in them". He goes further when he writes (1974:118), "Of all the arts that we have looked at in schools music is apparently in the greatest difficulty". His suggestion is that many of these apparent difficulties in music education stem from the kind of training that music teachers undergo. His conclusions hint strongly that there is conflict between who the teacher is and wants his pupils to be[6] and what might be perceived as a more legitimate instructional goal[7] for school music education.

The Faculty of Music at the University of Western Ontario, for example, claims that its goal for its music teacher preparation

programme is to "make musicians first, teachers second". This motto is widely known and widely promulgated in the Faculty of Music. One needs to ask, in light of the apparent gulf developing between music education as practised in the universities and music education as practised in the lower schools, just what meanings are taken into music education students' understanding of "musician" and what role this plays in their interaction with each other, with faculty and outsiders as they come to develop an "identity" as a "musician".

This is the sociological problem.

Music Teacher Education

To begin with, the professional education of a music teacher in Canada is typically the divided responsibility of a university music group (Faculty, School, Department, Division, etc.) and a university education group (Faculty, School, Department, Division, etc.).

Because of the jurisdictional variations among Canadian universities, the preparation of a music specialist in Canada cannot be easily described with a "typical" model. While there is the semblance of a uniform programme of studies with the inclusion of courses in musicology, theory, performance and a variety of elective things within the house of music (Schmidt, 1986, 1989), there are a large variety of teacher preparation delivery systems for the music specialist. These variations are largely jurisdictional within the university political make-up. They do, however consist of an otherwise unprecedented involvement of the academic unit (music) with the more usual mandate of education faculties. Some universities house the music

teacher education program in the Faculty of Education with academic input from the Music School or Faculty[8] in much the same way as any other discipline. In the other extreme, the Music Faculty has taken over virtually the entire process of teacher education. In some institutions the political arrangement is further confused because members of faculty hold joint appointments in both the music division and the education division, thus wearing one hat at one time and yet hat another at another time.

It is this variety of preparation models that might lead an observer to the conclusion that, although the teacher-education curriculum is a relatively stable entity, the mode of delivery is sufficiently varied to create differences in "product". It is the intent here to argue that the social outcomes of the preparation of the music specialist can best be illuminated from a stance that recognizes the "product" of teacher education as a social product as well as a knowledge or skill-based product. One might legitimately ask who these graduates are as well as just what they know.

If the curriculum content is substantively similar within institutions (Schmidt, 1986, 1989), the educational "product" must surely be differentiated not by what the student knows, but by who he is or thinks himself to be. That is to say, that the social product may be just as, if not more, important than the knowledge product that results from the music teacher education curriculum. This is more than Bernstein's (1971:50) "Framing" where the frame refers to "the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization and pacing of knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship"; this is a question of identity, of meaning associated with a

master status as "musician" and how that influences the processes of social interaction.

The involvement of Faculties of Music in teacher preparation remains an anomaly in Canada because no other university faculties in school curricular areas (eg. English, Mathematics, Science) have shown such substantial interest to have established themselves within the education discipline as distinct from their otherwise assumed academic expertise. There has been little investigation as to the importance of setting or context for the development of an identity as teacher, but Faculties of Music have been successful in convincing many university administrations that music and the study and teaching of music is somehow "special" and is dependant upon special knowledge and skills that are only available in a Faculty of Music setting.

As this process in the drift of responsibilities from the typical mandate of education faculties continues, it takes no great amount of imagination to conclude that some groups of people representing the one side come into conflict with groups from the other side. This view seems to correspond with the view of students and has been expressed by one American faculty member when she writes that,

> The freshman I know are not primarily motivated by the desire to become a teacher five years later, even if they have settled on teaching as a career plan. They are concerned about getting first chair in the band, about gaining the respect of their peers and studio teachers by spending more time in the practice room than any other freshman...(Meske, 1982:263)

The results of such programme decisions in the USA have been described by one of its most noteworthy university music educators when he writes,

> Existing programs are, without exception, hybrids, the result of a kind of random cross-fertilization of three related programs from different types of institutions - the conservatory, the liberal arts college, and the teachers college or normal school. The result has not been a beautiful flower which sometimes results from hybridization but an overgrown thicket which pleases nobody, not the musician, nor the humanist, not the educator.(Leonhard, 1982:245)

Thus it is clear that the first obvious anomaly is that music teachers may be typically much more concerned about "being a musician" than a science teacher is concerned about "being a scientist". Thus it is apparent that science teaching can be viewed as informed by science studies but that music teaching may often be viewed as a function of a musician. Thus the teacher's identity may become one of "master status" as "musician". One cannot just borrow the knowledge about music as one might in science, one must, rather, be a "musician".

There appears to be sufficient evidence about the music school to demonstrate that status is gained in large measure for "musician" roles. In fact, Kingsbury (1984:11) writes, "the important point for me, however, was the intensity of some students' concern for a sense of identity which was engendered by such matters". Who these students become, or think themselves to be, evolves as their "musician" identity, an identity which previously has been suggested to be a "master status"(Hughes, 1945) identity in the music school. We learn from Woods (1979:174-6) that turning certain typifications into stereotypes

are typical of institutions. The music school is such an institution and as such has developed formal official bandings such as "performance" majors and "music education" majors but also provides situational opportunities for socially constructed typifications to develop. One of these, the "definitionally superior performance major" is generally contested by music education majors. Woods writes somewhat later (1979:247-8) that "Pupils are engaged in a continual battle for who they are and who they are to become, while the forces of the institutionalization work to deprive them of their individuality and into a mould that accords with the teachers' ideal models". In the music school, however, it appears not only to be the teachers who wish to see the music education students relegated to their place in the social order. By contesting the social order of the "performance major" superiority, music education students show that their identity is not bound to roles which are prescribed for them. They have an apparent steadfast hold on the position that they are equals in terms of talent and thus potential as a performer which defies the more bureaucratic structure in which the "performance" majors seem able to operate because of its supportive sponsorship.

In the literature, the notion of "identity" has been described by McCall and Simmons (1978:65) as,

> the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position. More intuitively, such a role-identity is his imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position.

All music students appear to have idealized notions as to the role-content of the social role of "musician". It is for them, a social career[9] because it apparently requires a continuous negotiation to maintain. As the career develops there seem to be certain points of crisis and other times of social acceptance by others of the claim music students wish to make about their musician-role. There appears to be no contract between society and musicians like there is claimed to be in medicine or law for example. However, students do carry a notion of their idealized self with them. Whether there is any chance in reality to aspire to such heights remains a mystery. Consider this student's response when asked when she decided to study music at university,

> Always, I've always wanted to do music. I've always wanted to sing. I've always wanted to be famous.(Student interview)

Thus when McCall and Simmons (1978:65) write that "role-identity is his imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position", it is clear that any requirements for this student to make this claim remain solely in her own perception of that reality. If this student can conduct herself in a manner which is somehow consistent (and fulfilling of) the specific contents of her imaginative view of herself, that view becomes a legitimate one. McCall and Simmons (1978:69-70) suggest that many of our best role-performances take place purely in fantasy and imagination. But in interactional terms, the legitimation rests not only with convincing himself but also others of the claim on this identity.

Thus the student above who wishes to be seen as a "star" and having made such a social claim on this status, now apparently must go in search of Other who will react to her as a "star", that is she must seek

legitimation by both persuading not only herself but must, in some way or other, convince others that she is entitled to her claim as a "star". Furthermore, the support for this role must continue over time because the support for her "star" status is a fleeting phenomena and her claim to be a "star" will be challenged again and she will need to repeat the process of legitimation over again both for the needs of the others and also for herself, for it is important to fulfil one's imaginings and to live according to one's role-identities[10]. Individuals in a society want to be and to do as they imagine themselves being and doing in that society. If, as a "star-singer", this student can be accommodated within the music School, whatever other role-identities she might be considering such as "teacher" (albeit in lower priorities) might possibly remain oppressed and undeveloped and that could very well be against her own self-interest[11].

Often the person who stakes his aspirations on one identity seeks support for this role-performance at whatever cost to other more "realistic" goals. Because the standards, or role definition, against which the students must measure themselves can be set largely by the individual music school, this same "symbolic" community (Cohen, 1985), other students and members of faculty, may provide sufficient status reward for the continuation of the possibly less appropriate role-performance and subsequent denial of the importance of other role-performances that the student might also have need to develop. In fact, for those students who seem less able to compete for the limited rewards available, the option of taking one's distance from the role becomes more likely. Goffman's notion of role-distance plays an ever increasing part in the life of the less able to compete music student.

There appears to be incredible pressure brought to bear upon students[12] who, once having attained some measure of identity with the "musician" role, and having received even a modicum of social reward for the claim on this identity, that escape seems unlikely. The reciprocal is also true. In this case, the individual [our music education student] tries to manage "undisclosed discrediting information about self" (Goffman, 1963:42) such as having to participate in the acknowledgement that he does in fact have sympathies toward the stigmatised role as a potential educator.

In situations where students are, by comparison, seldom asked to construct other identities, eg. as a teacher, there also seems to develop little need for social support for this role-identity. McCall and Simmons (1978:81) claim that we act most forthright to legitimate those identities most in need of support.

However for the most part, students who have their musician identity threatened by lack of positive societal reaction from a perceived important audience, such as peers or professors, experience what McCall and Simmons (1978:98) rather graphically describe as "misery and anguish". This can be overcome, or at least diminished by the overvaluation of what few rewards are left. Thus, personal bonds, and simple norms of propriety and polite discourse usually ensure that sufficient representatives of significant others will offer rewards in quantities large enough to ensure the continuation of the fantasy. The identity claim can be personally judged as successful and the idealized self is once again freed from threat. However, this problem can be made more difficult for students, as will be shown, who define referent others more narrowly and subsequently it is much more difficult for

that person to find satisfactory role partners from which these limited rewards might be obtained.

It is then to the individual and his view of himself that we now turn.

The Construction of Self

Music education students who apply to the music school from the general school population are typically highly skilled musical executionists. They have all typically spent many years learning to play trumpets and clarinets and pianos and horns. In comparison to others in their secondary school classes or in private studios, they excelled. They were "musicians" in the school or studio setting and could be easily identified as such. As an applicant to the university music school[13], although threatened by the entrance protocol, the student usually comes with a high opinion about himself as a performer and claims his right to study music on the basis of this standing[14]. This student's reflection is not atypical when asked to comment on her self-acknowledged "star" status in high school. She says,

> I was a big fish in a little place. I did three musicals and had the lead all three years and was president of the choir for three years and band executive all five years, so I was in both the bands and choirs. I was on the student council, just as a music department rep.(Student interview)

Once accepted into the music school, the view of self apparently must be re-examined because all of the important self-acknowledged "big fishes" come together into a rather substantially enlarged "pond". This apparently requires, since it is immediately operationalized in the music school, that the students sort themselves out again and establish who is on which step of the performance ladder[15]. Since status is attributed to a greater degree to the higher steps on this performance ladder, it becomes very important to know where exactly you stand. Many students must change their view of themselves as they discover so many others who they acknowledge as playing equally well or even better. Some cling steadfastly to the top rung.

A student's own view, either in fact or fantasy, can survive only with reference to the community and the development of "reputation". The idea of a "reputation" is an important career concept because it allows a student to hold a particular view of himself for an extended period of time.

To build a "reputation" as a good performer appears to be a highly desirable thing for a music student to attempt. If he can establish a "reputation" then it becomes a "symbol" which can be viewed from outside to establish a perception by the person himself as to "who he is". Those without reputations must rely on sporadic clues as to their standing in the music school.

Nevertheless, many music students still appear to have an "idealised" identity. They seem to wish to be seen as performers, even those who admit to themselves they are not. This is hardly news of consequence in a music school that rewards people almost exclusively

as performers. But if this image in the mirror travels with the student beyond the borders of the music school, for instance into the classroom, perhaps there is cause for concern. This graduating student at MUN has yet to release the fantasy. She explains in response to a question regarding her perception of herself at the present time as a graduate,

> Well, I mean in one sense I could say half-jokingly I'd want you to be able say I'm a great performer, I'm a great this, I'm a great something else and in some ways I'd like to be better at certain things than I feel I am...Well, performance for one. (Student interview)

This next student is a graduate of UWO and has an honours degree in music education. At the time of the interview she was attending the Faculty of Education for her fifth year to qualify for certification as a teacher in Ontario. Her view still focuses on the "musician" aspects of her identity. "Professionally" she is a singer.

She replies,

> I'm a perspective teacher, I'm going to teachers college, I'm female, I'm almost 23. What type of description do you want?

To my reply,

> **Professional.**

she replied,

> Okay, well a singer - I'm a soprano (Student interview)

To be a competent school music teacher, the universities appear to operate on the assumption, and it seems to be taken for granted in society in general, that one needs to be a reasonably competent "musician". While the definition of "musician" is a point of serious disagreement, students often prefer to view themselves first and primarily as a "musician" even in the face of apparently more logical perceptions of themselves. This student comments as follows.

> It's a hard thing to be totally honest about but I think I would like to be seen perhaps first as a musician and then as a teacher...It's probably a terrible thing to say since I am going to be a music teacher in September.(Student interview)

This situation is not dissimilar from the position that some forms of music are perceived by students in the music school as being "evil". Because the teaching profession often alters the definition of "musician" to fit the teacher's needs, some students seem to cling to the music school definition and feel uncomfortable stating their true feelings about wishing to see themselves as "musicians". This is perhaps the most potent form of "side-bet" (Becker, 1960:32-40) made on behalf of the students committed to the music school.

Other possible comparisons within the music school would be with academics, as "students" or even as "developing teachers" in the education stream. But in almost every instance, even with students who did not feel strong as "performers", they preferred to be seen as a musician and would report perceiving social pressure to compare themselves "musically" rather than with these other possible criteria.

To the question as to how this student would like to be compared to others, we get this answer.

> I think musically. I don't always think that academically it matters if you're talking about marks and what you see on paper is that what you're referring to? (Student interview)

This view of self was examined with many of the students. No student responded that a "musical" comparison was other than the most important.

Here is a music education senior who is confident that he wishes to be seen as a "musician". In fact, she describes her schooling as the process of becoming a "musician". In fact quite simply as "How I perform". To a question as to why she might wish to be compared musically rather than academically she replied,

> Because that's what I'm doing here. I'm trying, musically, I'm trying to be a musician. I want to be a musician and that's what I'm interested in. (Student interview)

While it is perhaps odd that students do not see themselves preparing in any significant way to becoming a "teacher" despite registration in an education programme, that appears to be the case. With the exception of "performing", students return to "marks"[16] for an indication of how they see themselves. Even in the music school where performing is evaluated and "marks" are awarded, they do not appear to have much social significance.

Thus it appears clear that a student typically sees himself as a "musician" and wishes to be seen by others as a "musician".

In addition to the formal greeting, it can also be shown that students simply perceive the identity with the applied major as the reason for being in the music school in the first place. Consider the response to this question.

> **When I asked you who you were, the only thing you could tell me was that you were a trombone player. Why is that important?**
>
> Well that's what I'm here for and that's what I've been doing all through high school. (Student interview)

In fact, when you ask music education students what they study the response is usually an instrument. Although students may be officially studying in an academic major such as music education or musicology, the music education students, at least, respond that they are at university studying "piano".

In fact, music education majors even after graduation still view themselves as the product of a university programme where they studied "piano". Considering the wide range of musical subjects offered in the undergraduate music education degree programme, the self-identification with the applied major appears to remain secure and unfailing even after advancement into the Faculty of Education. This UWO graduate reports that, "I did my degree in piano and enjoyed it

quite a bit"(Student interview). Often students simply tell you that they see themselves as a "piano player".

In addition to seeing themselves as an instrumental appendage, they also see others in the same way. Certain students are even recognized as a "piano player". At the beginning of the academic year at the Faculty of Education at UWO, the members of the class began by introducing themselves to each other. This was necessary because there were students from other university music schools which had joined the group from the UWO graduating class. In each and every instance, without exception, the response was, "I'm XXXXXX and I'm a piano major" or some equivalent of that such as I'm a pianist, or I play piano.

Of course, the vocal major has a special problem with identity because his "instrument" is, in fact, part of his body and thus part of his being. Singers more than all other identify themselves with their "instrument". Thus singers become "tenors", "dramatic sopranos" or other more specific labels than just vocalist. In addition, the inability to separate oneself from one's instrument as a singer is often felt as a "curse" or "weight" in the same way as was discussed under "talent".

Of course, not all students see themselves as "pianists". Students who view themselves as not very good performers most frequently refer to themselves as "musicians". Thus it is clear that in the music school, "performer" is preferred over "musician" even though reference is frequently made to the performer who is not a "musician". Asked whether the executionist model for self identification was important as a "teacher", this senior at U of A replies,

> A little bit, yea, yea I always felt that they were better than me in piano...but.. Well because I'm an musician too. (Student interview)

There are those for whom the role and identification with the role as a "star" or just "performer" appears less vital. Again these students are generally more inclined to call themselves "musicians" or other more general terms as "all-round musician" or "well-rounded musician". For some, this "star" category is almost repulsive. This UWO graduate explains,

> I liked singing in choirs, performing in choirs,. I like doing solos in choirs but I don't like singing as a solo performer because of the belief or the facade or this person being a star and kind of like that; I like performing, I like singing ...(Student interview)

For others, it is simply a matter of not clinging to a strong personal identification with the applied major. For these students again, the label of "musician" was sufficient. This student reports,

> The instrument itself wasn't the most important thing in my life but the whole music business thing was being a music student was probably the most important thing in my life.(Student interview)

Thus it can be summarized that music education students typically view themselves as either a "performer" on some specific instrument to which there appears to be a strong affiliation as a player or another

category of student who views himself as a general "musician". It further appears that this latter category is the perception of self for students who see themselves less able to compete for the "performer" status. Despite the fact that all of these students are participating in a teacher education programme, their identity is and remains squarely as a "musician".

Endnotes

1. Music education students in this study are those students who have elected some university's official teacher training program for music teachers. It defines the "sociological sub-group" specifically from other "university music" students who may be taking "performance" programmes or "theory & composition. The nature of the boundaries about these groups and sub-groups are worked out in some detail later in the thesis.

2.There is an implied assumption here that these students do come to develop this "identity". It is somewhat the dilemma of the rat chasing its tail here as the study actually presents the data and analysis in a way to demonstrate that this assumption results from the analysis and is not a precursor to it.

3."Identity" in this study is developed fully later and derives from the writings of McCall & Simmons (1978) and Lofland (1969).

4.Interaction is taken here in the fullest Symbolic interactionist's and Meadean sense of both with "others" and with "self".

5.It is not a moot point here that the education of a music teacher is described as a "process" rather than in different words. This study takes the position that the educational "product", in light of a rather significant consensus in university curricula for music teacher candidates (Schmidt, 1986,1989) is not as critical as the social construction of an "identity". It might be more simply stated perhaps as "not what you know but who you are".

6.Becker's concept of "ideal pupil" perhaps.

7.Of course the question may not be a simple matter of "goal" and may be much more significantly tied to what counts as "music" altogether. Again we must refer back to the sociology of knowledge (see MFD Young (1971). Here there are clear signs of a hierarchy of music knowledge.

8.The use of the designation Faculty of Music, Music Faculty and School of Music are the most common designates in Canada. They are used as synonymous terms here. The members of faculty, ie. the professors, are so designated so as to avoid confusion between the people and the institution.

9.Woods, P (1979) refers to career as a "progression of events" and uses this construct to explain "showing-ups". He writes, "the exposed person [to the showing-up] experiences an assault on his 'identity' and feels confusion, since his previous identity was the basis of others' expectations of him" (p.125). Music education students appear to experience this same kind of "assault" since they too, base so much of their identity on the expectations of Others.

10.For a particularly strong diatribe against the "static" notion of "role" see Coulson, M. "Role: a redundant concept in sociology? Some educational considerations" in J.A.Jackson (ed.) (1972) Role: Sociological Studies 4. Cambridge University Press.

11.another possible omniscient observer's comment. There is a constant challenge to determine whether the student is able to construct an identity as a "teacher" at the same time this apparently strong need to construct as "Musician self" seems so important.

12.Becker's (1960) "side-bet"

13.Kingsbury (1984:11) writes, "admission to the music school is generally awarded in terms of a high level of skill in a very narrowly conceived area".

14. Kingsbury (1984:38) points out that "conservatory musicians continually treat the terms "music" and "musical" as concrete terra firma categories in their explanatory statements in spite of the fact that these notions are highly contingent and occasionally self-contradictory". I would hasten to add that the term "musician" seems, in everyday usage, to be treated by members of music school in a similar fashion. This is perhaps not surprising considering the inter-connection between or among these three categories. It is not surprising that Kingsbury omitted this category "musician" since his study, although using the perspectives and meanings of the conservatory "musicians", focused more centrally on the actual social construction of the category of "music" itself.

15.This rather linear model is not exactly the best metaphor since the nature of the "musician" as a social construct allows for a vast, almost infinite variations. But, despite this, there is still a sense that, once having accepted a social definition, the students resort to more "simplistic" normative scale. They certainly talk quite openly about the "best" and "playing better". They also appear to accept a "community" view of how students are ranked as "musicians".

16.see Becker (1968) Making the Grade

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